

**Mission, Missionaries and the Evangelization of Europe:
Towards an Integrating Missiology from a Latin American Perspective**

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I Introduction

The purpose of this essay is to promote reflection on the missionary task which will help foster an integrating missiology between missions, missionaries and the need for evangelization in Europe. The spiritual need of Europe is no longer simply the subject of missiological reflection, but rather a reality which requires new models through which the redemptive mission can be accomplished. We shall therefore assume the integrating model which we find in the initial missiological encounter between Peter and the Gentiles as related in Acts chapter 10.

The question which we would like to ask has to do with diachronic mission and synchronic mission for the present millennium. What legitimizes the missionary presence of Latin Americans in Europe? To attempt an answer, we shall focus on three topics: missions and their present reality in Latin America; missionaries and their present reality in Europe, and evangelization and its present reality in Europe. Our methodology involves an analysis of both the past and the present; we shall explain the reason for certain encounters as well as disencounters (related to missiological dislocation or fragmentation, which produces a lack of mission reciprocity; i.e., failures of people and groups to encounter each other authentically and

reciprocally). In so doing we shall propose a practice which is motivated by an alternative missiology which promotes more encounters and fewer disencounters.

Through its mission activity, the evangelical movement produces different realities. Here, with encounters as well as disencounters in mind, we analyze three of these in the light of the movement's history that can help us to understand the challenge of an integrating missiology. We shall suggest the integration of conventional and non-conventional missionaries, and an alternative which is aimed at fostering a twofold integrating missionary endeavour based on *flexible reciprocal integration* and *an intentional strengthening of bridges of reciprocal missionary encounter*. Also, we have attempted to formulate a credo for an integrating reciprocal missiology.

II Missions and their present reality in Latin America

1. Present Reality

In his book *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, Scottish missiologist Andrew Walls¹ described a shift in the centre of gravity in Christianity from North to South, accompanied by a decline of Christianity in Europe and massive growth in Latin America, Africa and Asia. This interpretation leads us to consider the following three aspects of a new reality for mission.

a) Analysis of change. Both Andrew Walls and Samuel Escobar warned the church of coming changes during the 1980s and 1990s. Today, many of us are privileged to experience in person these changes in God's redemptive mission which are being felt throughout the world. These changes provide us with new prospects for mission, which must be discerned in the light of God's *kairos* and of an interpretation of the biblical message guided by the contextual lens of a God who makes himself known to his church and who acts in history. This is called the *missio Dei*, in which the church serves a God who is creator, redeemer and owner of mission.²

b) New prospects for mission in Europe. We acknowledge with humility the fact that the *missio Dei* is not static, but rather dynamic, tension-laden, opening up new mission fields. It is dynamic because the Holy Spirit blows where he wills (Jn. 3:8), and tension-laden because redemptive action through the church is always in tension, whether positive or negative.

c) The creation of new models of mission. We have been able to identify at least ten models of mission throughout the history of evangelization in Latin America, including Bible distribution, church planting, faith missions, and mission through migration.³ In 1916 there were 170,000 Protestants, and it is calculated that by 1990 there were 48 million.⁴ At present, the optimistic figure is at about 80 million, while a

conservative figure is at 60 million.⁵ These figures are related to various change factors which are religious, missiological and economic.

When it comes to the religious factor, it is important to note that Latin America produced the kind of cultural Catholicism in which it was assumed that to be a *Latino* one had to be Catholic. Missiologically, following the Panama Congress of 1916 there was a flow of foreign missionaries, primarily from the United States and Great Britain, but also from Sweden and Germany, such that by 1990 there were 12,000 Protestant missionaries working in Latin America.⁶ In contrast, it was predicted that by the 1990s 100,000 missionaries from the 'North' and 85,000 from the 'South' would be working on the field, and by 2000 the number of missionaries from the North was estimated at 120,000, while the number from the Southern hemisphere 160,000.⁷ However, *Operation World* lists 91,837 non-Western missionaries⁸ and the *World Christian Encyclopedia* gave a figure of 336,070 Western missionaries (Europe: 192,346; Northern America: 135,222, and Oceania: 8,502), and 83,454 non-Western missionaries (Africa: 17,406, Asia: 24,504, and Latin America: 41,544) by the year 2001.⁹

These figures provide evidence that the mission enterprise has been developed under the influence of the Western models. Accordingly, Michael Jaffarian argued in 2004 that it is not true that there are more non-Western missionaries than Western missionaries.¹⁰ Thus new statistics for 2010 will reveal if this figure has changed. However, the fact is that in the case of Latin America the number of missionaries has grown considerably in recent years.

On the third front, economic changes have led to unimaginable social transformation which has produced a great migration from South to North. Preferred nations for immigration are the United States, Spain, Sweden, Great Britain and France. This factor has caused a movement of the evangelical community as a massive but unexpected missionary movement to the North, especially Europe.

2. Point of Encounter

There have been various congresses which have helped to create points of missionary encounter in Latin America. Among those of great historical and theological importance we can mention first of all CLADE (s) I (1969), II (1979), III (1992), IV (2000), together with the formation of the Latin American Theological Fraternity in 1970, which emerges as a vital movement of critical theological and missiological reflection and of new mission proposals from within a Latin American context. Then there was the July 1976 Curitiba Congress in Brazil, which brought together more than 500 Latin American university students, and which concluded with the 'Curitiba Declaration' and a dedication to promoting mission within and beyond Latin America in the spirit of the Lausanne Covenant of 1974. The Curitiba Covenant affirms the historic evangelical Latin American mission, the church's missionary vocation and the church's new missionary

situation in the world. It likewise recognizes the need to cross geographical boundaries, but also those of inequality, injustice and idolatry;¹¹

Another congress which set a new course in Latin American mission was the first Latin American Missionary Congress, known more commonly as COMIBAM, which took place in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in 1987, with the participation of 3,000 delegates. Of special note was the enthusiasm with which Latin America was declared as a missionary force instead of mission field.

With this brief description of these congresses our aim has been to explain the process whereby God has been changing the missionary axis point so that it will become an alternative or complementary missionary force in the present millennium. With a wider mission consultation among the evangelicals in mind, it is worth mentioning the 'Iguassu Dialogue', organized by the WEA-Missions Commission held in Brazil in October 1999,¹² which brought reflective practitioners to analyze their missiological foundations, commitments, and practices and to propose new prospects for mission in the new millennium.

Similar congresses were planned for 2010 such as the 'Edinburgh 2010' with an ecumenical view,¹³ and 'Tokyo 2010',¹⁴ which was more related to the Third World Mission Associations (TWMA) under the influence of Ralph Winter's missiology of 'unreached people'. However, it now seems that there is a new emphasis on 'Discipling all Peoples' because the missiology of the 'unreached' is tending to disappear, or at least to have less impact among the evangelicals due to the fact that it has been challenged by a wider mission theology such holistic mission or mission as transformation.¹⁵ Finally, we may mention 'Cape Town 2010', an evangelical congress in the spirit of the Lausanne movement, scheduled to gather 4,000 mission leaders from around the world in October 2010.

3. Point of Disencounter

One of the distinctions within Latin American groups that promote holistic mission is their rejection of the influence of a managerial missiology; this approach lays stress on the verbal proclamation of the message and the church's numerical growth as the most significant elements in Christian mission. One of the factors giving rise to this distinction is the imperialistic nature and the sense of triumphalism in regard to statistics and the control of church growth data which are found in Latin America.¹⁶ This situation has created an atmosphere in which Latin American missiologists have felt the need to issue a call for integrity in motivation for mission and a challenge to live out a Gospel of integral mission not only in word but also in deed.

From this historic angle we might say that any theology of missiology which is put into practice generates a meeting of minds as well as conflicts in the life and mission of the church. Therefore, in relation to the present mission in Europe, the new reality that is before us should be understood, analyzed and directed in the power of the Holy Spirit.

III Missionaries and their present reality in Europe

1. Present reality

The new presence of Latin American, Asian and African missionaries in Europe is in keeping with a missional process which emerges not from human action, but from the divine, from the owner and Lord of redemptive mission. Therefore, we assume that the new fact of missionaries of the South presently in Europe is a mission of the Triune God in which the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are mobilizing new missionary forces on two fronts: conventional missionaries (those who go through the traditional route, i.e. established mission agencies), and non-conventional missionaries (who are sent through social, political and global economic forces, such as immigration, 'business as mission', new tentmakers, etc.). The basic questions to address in this new mission context are: what sort of missionaries is Europe receiving at present? And what sort of missionaries does Europe really need? In particular, does Europe need conventional highly-professionalized missionaries?

2. Point of Encounter

If we stop in for a coffee break at Starbucks to analyze the type of missionary that Europe is receiving we shall realize that the majority belongs to the non-conventional category. One reason for this is that nearly the entire conventional missionary force has been directed toward the 10/40 window. It seems to me that the U.S. Centre for World Mission, under the leadership of Ralph Winter, since the 1970s, has been one of the most influential tools in the mobilization of conventional missionaries towards specific targets, fundamentally the 'unreached people'. This can be seen through its *Mission Frontiers*' bulletin.¹⁷ This mission theology has profoundly impacted the Latin American evangelical movement, which is evident in Latin America's conventional missionary force.

In the case of Europe, in one sense, perhaps, Latin American missionaries can develop their ministry and mission service with fewer financial resources than other models. This can be seen in the hundreds already in Europe. We are under the impression that in these circumstances it is not necessary to create more exotic forms of missionary sending/receiving structures, but rather to improve existing ones.

One task of a *reciprocal encounter* would be to make an effort to recognize that Latin American missionaries are guided by a worldview whose spirituality is based on spontaneous evangelization. For this reason I call them 'wartime missionaries', since they are inclined to withstand considerable spiritual and economic hardship until they achieve their goals.

We observe that Latin Americans who work in Europe must make the effort to become integrated into the culture of the country in which they do mission. Latin Americans enjoy the enthusiasm of spontaneous

preaching because it is part of their evangelical culture; an understanding of this on the part of the European church can help to create *bridges of reciprocal missionary encounter*.

On the other side, learning the language and becoming familiar with the ecclesiology at work in one's adopted land become opportunities to develop what I call a *reciprocal missionary amalgamation*. As amalgam is made of silver and mercury and serves to treat dental cavities, so a reciprocal missionary amalgamation is a fusion of resources and missiological interpretations which serves to heal those things which weaken the church's mission.

3. Point of Disencounter

If the mixture in a reciprocal missionary amalgamation is inadequate it is, in my view, because the dialogue between the Latin American and European missionary forces is still in embryo or infancy stage. The basic reason for this view is that we observe that European leaders appear to be searching for Latin American missionaries whose perspective is the conventional one. This can lead to frustration in both mission contexts, for while one group tries to assume that God has brought them, the other group tries to submit this to the scrutiny of conventional missiology. To this we add the tension of the apparent triumphalism of those described as non-conventional missionaries, which can create an atmosphere of disencounter with regard to the national leadership of the established churches in Europe.

Another key element worth considering in this process of new changes in mission is the fact that a weakness in the Latin American missionary force is its lack of an worldview which would allow it to be integrated with the culture of its adopted country; something which requires sustained study is its failure to participate more fully in the life of established national churches in Europe. In the case of Spain, for example, the language helps, but this is insufficient for cultural integration. In the case of Germany, Sweden or the United Kingdom, the language is a great barrier to integration, given the Latin American missionary force's missiological pragmatism, whereby intentional language study is not taken into consideration. So we might ask how many of those from the South have become integrated into the European church.

Another issue is the lack of the kind of national leadership which is willing to take the risk relating to a *flexible reciprocal integration*, i.e. one which will provide forms of cultural and social integration, as well as integration into the life of the European church, whose flavour differs from that of Latin America. Integration also involves finding theological common ground which will forge a society characterized by more justice and less discrimination, more harmony and less social conflict in the midst of the Church's mission.¹⁸ A *flexible reciprocal integration* would assist in introducing and strengthening mission forces, whether conventional or non-conventional.

IV Evangelization and its present reality in Europe

1. Present reality

In order to better understand why a missiological trend aimed at the evangelization of Europe exists today, we must answer two questions: What is evangelization and what is God doing presently? We assume that we must remember that in the first instance what we need is to recover an understanding of what evangelization means for the European continent. In this sense the Lausanne Covenant offers a good definition:

To evangelize is to spread the Good News that Jesus Christ died for our sins and was raised from the dead according to the Scriptures, and that as the reigning Lord he now offers the forgiveness of sins and the liberating gifts of the Spirit to all who repent and believe. *Our Christian presence in the world* is indispensable to evangelism, and so is that kind of dialogue whose purpose is to listen sensitively in order to understand. But evangelism itself is the proclamation of the historical, biblical Christ as Saviour and Lord, with a view to persuading people to come to him personally and to be reconciled to God (*italics mine*)¹⁹

Regarding evangelization, the Lausanne Covenant ends with a categorical reminder that we are not at liberty to dilute the cost of discipleship, nor to avoid identifying with the new community, which is the church. For this reason biblical evangelism 'includes obedience to Christ, incorporation into his church, and responsible service in the world'.²⁰ In this sense, the church of both South and North needs to analyse more profoundly, in the light of this definition, the way in which it is carrying out the church's task of evangelization. By nature the church should experience an evangelizing mission which proclaims in word and deed the redemptive and transformative message which Christ has given to his church.

What God is doing at present can be summarized with the words of Mennonite missiologist Wilbert Shenk regarding new strategies for mission. Shenk explains first that the ideal held forth in the new forms of mission involves interdependence with a recognized system in which decision-making is shared; then that the Asian, African and Latin American missionary forces at present demonstrate great vitality and dedication to mission, but with few resources and finally, that the presence of the suffering church demonstrates the role of the Holy Spirit in present mission.²¹

To these three strategic processes we would add two more that are impacting the new forms of mission. First, there is a need for a parallel strengthening of missionary ecclesiology in Latin America and Europe. This assumption implies that missions as organizations are losing their ability to obtain human and material resources for mission. Second, there is a need to redistribute mission resources according to a contextual mission perspective. That is, spiritual resources need to be applied to areas of spiritual need, and material resources to areas of material need. In some cases a parallel application of both will be necessary. Nevertheless, integral mission is fundamental in either case.

The current stress on multidirectional missiology does not mean that the global church must practice a 'mutinational' philosophy in which resources are transferred from one place to the other while decision-

making power is retained. An alternative model involves a democratic missionary theology in which there is greater participation in fundamental (not only secondary) decision-making on the part of all those involved in mission. We propose that we need to foster what we call a 'from countryside to city' missiology, in which strategic cities are converted into sources of nourishment for those places with fewer resources, both in terms of people as well as opportunities for evangelistic efforts.

2. Point of Encounter

More than seventy years ago, Dutch theologian Hendrick Kraemer²² proposed a mission theology of contact between similarities and differences within the Christian faith and other religions.

For Kraemer, the key point of contact among all subsequent ones is the missionary. This focal point helps us to understand that the missionary is the key channel or messenger in Christian mission, but that the missionary represents the community of believers. It is not an individualized mission, but more properly a corporate one, since the church or community of believers is the focal point of all mission activity, the source from which the missionary and mission structures are continually fed. The missionary as instrument, however, is not a disinfected or antiseptic tool which is not completely involved in the process of evangelization.²³

We see this in John 15 with the metaphor of the vineyard; it is also used by the apostle Paul in the metaphor of the ambassador (1 Cor. 5:20). Both metaphors demonstrate total involvement on the part of the messenger in evangelization which carries with it the task of representing the kingdom of God.

Consequently, it is necessary to promote a type of missiological training in order to carry out that representative work in a way that is appropriate, worthy and consistent. Mission training models, whether conventional or otherwise, must become a fundamental activity and, on that basis, be taken as a point of encounter through which we might become worthy representatives of the *missio Dei*. I assume that Europe can become a channel of reciprocal aid for the better training of missionaries, both conventional and non-conventional.

Something which can be rescued from traditional mission is precisely the effort which goes into training people before sending them out in cross-cultural mission. This prospect of careful training (which must be improved) for evangelization in a post-Christian world may help minimize the number of casualties in the new atmosphere of globalized missiology. In this sense, *Worth Keeping*²⁴ offers an exhaustive proposal for better long-term missionary practice in global perspective. The point of encounter which we propose emerges from a Trinitarian mission theology which is grounded in a relational and communitarian mission in which the church is the focal agent for mission rather than simply certain individuals. In this regard we agree with Lesslie Newbigin, the missionary in India, who spoke of the local church as the hermeneutic of the Gospel, rather than the individual.

3. Point of Disencounter

Since the 1990s the evangelization of Europe has become an unfinished task in which the church of the South must take part. It is not a recent phenomenon, as some assume, but rather a move of the Holy Spirit which has manifested itself slowly and quietly, but also firmly and steadily. Providing evidence for this process are missionary movements which have emerged, such as the Latin American Theological Fraternity, Mission for the Third Millennium, COMIBAM, SEPAL, BACK to EUROPE, and others. The need, we suggest, is for greater dialogue, as well as familiarity on the part of the North with the growth of the missionary force from the South.

Who is making this new global mission reality known? Clearly, information comes from mission leaders who have the means to disseminate information systematically, 'from above'. The other source of information in integral mission is 'from below'; this creates a new mission consciousness regarding the presence of a new mission force. For some, this new reality is still the source of headaches, even though they have already taken the required dose of tranquilizers so as to deal with the missiological pain of imminent changes. Others, however, have already managed to forge a new missiology of reciprocal collaboration.

These are the new processes with which we must be acquainted in order to be encouraged as we face changes in the missionary task. The reality is that new ethnic churches are opening in Europe as the missionary force of the South continues to grow with its contagious evangelistic enthusiasm, just as the trend toward the evangelization of Europe grows from day to day.

Here an illustration of what is taking place: We arrived in Barcelona in 1991. We were, perhaps, the first semi-conventional missionaries sent by a local church in Peru to plant a church among Latin Americans. At that time there were few Latin American missionaries in Spain. Today the situation is quite different, as there are at present more than seventy registered Latin American churches only in Barcelona. Without exaggeration, some say that that number could easily double.

Thus, we have an idea of the changes that mission groups, missionaries and the evangelization of Europe are experiencing in our day. Therefore we must accept the great responsibility of fostering an integrating missiology which is characterized as unifying, diverse, flexible, and whose theology is a missionary one. An appropriate missionary theological understanding is that missional integration does not do away with diversity in mission. On the contrary, it makes it dynamic in the context of the missionary life of the church.

V Conclusion

To conclude, we understand that the trend of missiological change will continue to grow and that the involvement of the missionary force from the South will gradually increase until it becomes integrated with the life of the European churches. These changes, however, will take time, and will require a revitalization

of missionary ecclesiology for two reasons: first, the church of the South will need to become more aware of the need to train and send qualified missionaries to the European context, and second, it is essential that European churches become more open to helping the missionary force which is present in Europe, and indeed new missionaries which are already on their way from Africa, Asia and Latin America, in a more integral way.

This must not be interpreted as a missiological avalanche, nor as some sort of post-imperial conquest, but rather as a work of the Holy Spirit, who wills to establish new ambassadors of the kingdom in a continent in which the church is in need of new spiritual vitality, not because it has lost it completely, but because the vitality of the past is gradually weakening, perhaps not because of the church alone, but because of the post-Christian environment which Europe is experiencing at present.

What follows is an attempt to formulate a credo for an integrating reciprocal missiology, which might serve to foster a new missionary theological thinking and missionary reflection:²⁵

I believe that an integrating work between the missionary forces of the North and the South is possible,

I believe that to find more points of encounter than disencounter in God's mission through the church is feasible,

I believe that it is possible to forge more positive tensions than negative ones in the midst of a missionary endeavour which is at one and the same time united and diverse,

I believe in the need to learn from the missional encounters and disencounters of history with an approach which is biblical, motivating, encouraging and challenging for today's church, and

I believe in practicing a Trinitarian integrating missiology with the presence of the love of God the Father, the grace of God the Son, and the power of God the Holy Spirit, acting in the church which seeks to integrate models between missionaries and mission organizations.

Finally, what we propose as an alternative is aimed at fostering a twofold integrating missionary endeavour that bears two factors in mind" first that *flexible reciprocal integration* is to be fostered intentionally, bearing in mind the socio-cultural context, as well as the life of the church; second, that *bridges of reciprocal missionary encounter* are to be strengthened intentionally, bearing in mind the context of evangelical cultural mission.

We end with the following question: Might it be possible to replace the concept of North and South with a more integrating approach such as 'Norsouth', or perhaps integrating global mission?

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- ¹ Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), p. 41.
- ² See further Chris Wright, *The Mission of God* (Illinois: IVP Academic, 2006).
- ³ For the Latin American model see further Miguel A. Palomino 'Latino Immigration in Europe: Challenge and Opportunity for Mission', Issue 28:2 (April 2004), 54-58.
- ⁴ Samuel Escobar, in James M. Phillips and Robert T. Coote (Editors), *Toward the 21st Century in Christian Mission* (Grand Rapids Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 127.
- ⁵ Emilio A. Nuñez and William Taylor, *Crisis and Hope in Latin America* (Pasadena, C.A: William Carey Library, 1996), 161.
- ⁶ Escobar, *Toward the 21st Century*, 28.
- ⁷ Larry D. Pate, *From Every People: A Handbook of Two-Third World Missions with Directory/Histories/Analysis* (Monrovia, California: MARC 1989), 51-52.
- ⁸ Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk, *Operation World: When we Pray God Works, 6th ed.* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), 747.
- ⁹ David B. Barret, George Thomas Kurian and Todd M. Johnson (editors), *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World Volume I: The World by Countries, Religions, Churches, Ministries*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2001), 1:843.
- ¹⁰ Michael Jeffarian, 'Are There More non-Western Missionaries than Western Missionaries?', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, 28:3 (July 2004), 131-132.
- ¹¹ Escobar, *Toward the 21st Century*, 131.
- ¹² William Taylor, *Global Missiology for the 21st Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic 2000), 1-13.
- ¹³ Metropolitan Coorilos Geevarghese, 'Towards and Beyond Edinburgh 2010: A Historical Survey of Ecumenical Missiological Developments since 1910', *International Review of Mission*, 99. 1 (390), (April 2010), 14.
- ¹⁴ Ralph Winter and David Taylor, 'The Story of a Movement from William Carey to Tokyo 2010', *Mission Frontiers* (September – October 2009), 19-23.
- ¹⁵ See the ne emphasis in David Taylor, 'Discipling All Peoples: Today's Imperative and the Vision of Tokyo 2010', *Mission Frontiers* (September – October 2009), 6-13.
- ¹⁶ Escobar, *Toward the 21st Century*, 131.
- ¹⁷ *Mission Frontiers* is the bulletin of the U.S. Centre for World Mission founded by Ralph Winter in 1979. See Rick Wood, 'Join Mission Frontiers in Celebrating our 30th Year', *Mission Frontiers* (January - February 30:1, 2008), 24.

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- ¹⁸ John Stott, *Issues Facing Christians Today* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1984), 270.
- ¹⁹ John Stott (Editor) *Making Christ Known: Historic Mission Documents from the Lausanne Movement 1974 -1989* (Carlisle, Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1996), 20.
- ²⁰ Stott, *Making Christ Known*, 20.
- ²¹ Wilbert Shenk in *Toward the 21st Century*, 231.
- ²² David Bosch, *A Spirituality of the Road* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1979), 42.
- ²³ Bosch, *A Spirituality of the Road*, 42.
- ²⁴ Rob Hay, Valerie Lim, Detlef Blocher, et.al *Worth Keeping: Global Perspectives on Best Practice in Missionary Retention* (Pasadena, California: William Carey Library, 2007).
- ²⁵ For a critical analysis of the Apostolic Creed and its influence in church's mission see Nicholas Lash, *Believing Three Ways in One God: A Reading of the Apostles' Creed* (London: SCM Press, 1992).